

Identity, Communal Consciousness and Politics

Author(s): Ghanshyam Shah

Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 19 (May 7, 1994), pp. 1133-1140

Published by: [Economic and Political Weekly](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4401169>

Accessed: 04/01/2011 01:27

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=epw>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Economic and Political Weekly* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Economic and Political Weekly*.

# Identity, Communal Consciousness and Politics

Ghanshyam Shah

*To what extent do different cross-sections of society subscribe to the communal ideologies which provide legitimacy to communal riots? To answer this question we need to explore people's perceptions on communal divisions and related issues. An attempt is made in this paper to examine individual identity and communal consciousness and their manifestation in the political arena through a survey of people from different parts of Surat city which witnessed communal riots in December 1992 soon after the demolition of Babri masjid.*

INQUIRIES into the nature and intensity of communal riots in Surat and elsewhere reveal that though *agents provocateurs* and participants in acts of violence were few, a large number of onlookers occasionally joined the crowd and extended subtle support to the rioters. On the eve as well as during the riots in the city, the atmosphere was surcharged with emotions reinforcing communal categories and idioms. To what extent do the cross-sections of a society share the communal ideology which provides legitimacy to such riots? In order to understand this, we need to explore perceptions and opinions of the people on the subject of communal division and related issues. As a preliminary exercise to understand the complexities of 'mind-sets' of people, let us examine the nature of individual identity and communal consciousness and also how they get manifested in the political arena. The present study is confined to Surat city which witnessed communal riots in December 1992, soon after demolition of Babri masjid. The study is based on survey research, interviewing 723 persons in May-June 1993, from various parts of the city.\*

## I

### Identity

Individual identity is not just one's relationship with others. It is not merely an ascriptive or achieved membership of this or that collectivity. It is essentially a matter of being and it is this consciousness of belonging to this or that collectivity and of being a member of an imagined community that determines the form of this identity. Such being or belonging is codified and invented by one's own self or assigned by others. The course of 'invention' and 'imposition' is complex and contextual. Take a simple example of one identifying as a kshatriya. One may inherit this identity from a family or a social collectivity in which one socialises. It is an ascriptive identity. And/or one begins to identify as a kshatriya in spite of the 'jati' being different in order to gain status and security as well as expand one's social sphere or for widening one's relationship for creating and reinforcing the

support base in public life. Such an identity may also be assigned to an individual by census, historians, social scientists and social or political leaders and over time may be imbibed by a community and hence its members. The notion of identity is contextual and keeps changing with time and space. In the complex modern world one simultaneously has more than one set identity. For instance, an individual may be a nagar brahmin ('jati'), brahmin ('varna'), vaishnava, Hindu, Surati, Gujarati, Indian, businessman, Congressman, social activist and so on at the same time. While being conscious of all these identities one expresses them varying in varying contexts. Nonetheless, certain identities within a given socio-political milieu have precedence over other identities.

Identity formation which is often, but not always, a cultural construct, is a process of 'inclusion and exclusion' of values and symbols defining 'we' and 'they' or 'us' and 'others'. In the process boundaries between the two take shape whose forms keep changing from time to time. Relationships between 'we' and 'they' are not necessarily always conflicting or competitive. Acknowledgements of commonality and overlappings between the two in various social spheres often blur the boundaries. On the other hand, when a cultural identity takes a political form, differentiations between 'we' and 'they' get sharper and hardened. Conflict and competition between the two—particularly for those who give political meaning to identity and/or vie for the control of resources—become sharp and tend to gather a specific shape. In the process, meaning of 'we' and 'they' also change that of the cultural construct. Prejudices become pronounced and boundaries for interactions get redrawn wherein commonality is ignored or underplayed and differentiations are stretched or reinvented.

It is an agenda for the Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists alike to ignore occupational and internal socio-cultural differentiations within the religious communities. Their aim is to shape and carve out unified monolithic Hindu or Muslim identity of an individual. Towards such an end, symbols are evolved, legends are invented and history is

reinterpreted. Besides ideological reconstructions, several programmes are launched in order to develop communal identity and consciousness of the two religious groups. Hatred against each other is invoked and exhorted. People however do not necessarily get carried away by such propaganda always. Often selective, they get persuaded by exhortations suiting their material or psychological needs. Along with other intra-group social or individual rivalries, such campaigns nevertheless pave the way to communal violence. Riots in return reinforce the communal identity. An individual who has internalised communal consciousness may or may not participate directly in riots but tends to legitimise violence. Therefore, understanding the nature of communal identity and its associated consciousness becomes imperative for comprehending communal phenomena.

In order to ascertain as to what was uppermost in respondents' minds about their identity, we asked open-ended questions: "Different people introduce themselves differently. Given the fact that some introduce themselves by their occupations such as businessman, worker, teacher, etc. Some by region such as Gujarati, Tamilian, Bihari and the like, some by 'jati' and some by their 'dharma', how would you introduce yourself to a stranger asking for your introduction?". The question was somewhat repeated to know the second identity. Of course, one's introduction to a stranger does not necessarily capture complexities of identity. This is only one tentative clue to unfolding one's identity. A caveat needs to be entered about the context that people were interviewed in May-June 1993, soon after the second phase of riots. And respondents were told that our study was regarding the recent communal disturbances in the city.

The responses are reported in Table 1. It is a cross-table giving first and second identity. Since 9 per cent of the respondents did not answer the first question, the second question was not applicable to them. One-fifth of the respondents did not give their second identity. For them there was no difference between their first and second identity.

One-fifth of the population identified themselves as belonging to specific religious groups. All of them however did not introduce themselves as Hindus or Muslims. A few expressed their identity by sect. "I am none but a Swaminarayani and all those who follow the Swaminarayan sect are my brothers and sisters", a businessman dealing in diamond trade told us. He had a 'tilak' placed on his forehead which is a distinct mark of the sect. Similar instances were also found among the Muslims. For example, a Sunni Vohra businessman preferred to be called a Sunni Vohra rather than a Muslim. One-fourth of those giving religion as their first identity also repeated it to be their second identity. In this case, they gave the name of their sect. That is, the first identity as Hindu and the second as Vaishnava or vice versa.

A majority who placed religious identity over other identities are workers in white collar jobs and students. Religious identity was expressed in larger proportion by the minority groups. Their number is larger among the Jains, Christians and Buddhists than the Muslims. Among the adivasis expressing religious identity was preferred only by a handful of persons. The highest proportion of those who preferred to be introduced by their religions is found in middle and upper caste groups.

Self identity expressed through caste is pronounced among a sizeable section of both Hindus as well as Muslims. Those giving caste as their first identity constitute the single largest group. Even in terms of expressions related to the second identity, caste remains predominant. Many reiterated their caste status and identification by placing themselves within specific sub-castes as the second identity. In other words, while the first time one identifying himself as a kshatriya called himself koli at the second level of identity. Thus it appears that for the majority the caste identity is either the first which precedes religious or regional identity; or the second, next to regional identity. While many who preferred to express caste as their first identity are distributed broadly in similar proportion across all occupational groups, they are however slightly more among casual labourers. A large number of them belong to the OBCs and only a small proportion belong to the SCs. In Surat, OBCs have emerged as a political force only recently and are an upwardly mobile group.

One-fifth of the respondents expressed their first identity by the place of their origin either by region or city. Significantly, a majority of those inclined to be introduced in this manner are local Suratians. Twenty-three per cent of the Suratians as against 17 per cent of the immigrants preferred to place their regional identity over identities like caste or religion. However, for many of them the second identity was expressed

through their religion. Thus, to them, regional and religious identity go together, as it is the case of caste and religion.

Only a few (9 per cent) liked to be identified by their names that I am so and so. Many among them also repeated that as the second introduction. A majority among this group are white and blue collar workers and belong to OBCs, SCs and STs. Seven per cent of the respondents preferred to be introduced as Indians first and a majority among them chose to express their second identity through religion or caste. This does not seem surprising in a situation where religion and nation are seen as co-terminus with one another. Only a few expressed their first identity through their occupation. They are mainly factory owners, businessmen and white collar employees, belonging generally to upper and artisan caste groups.

The nature of economic growth in India in general and Surat in particular with a significant portion of its labour force placed in its informal sector has had little impact in the formation of the secular identity. Electoral politics has helped in reinforcing primordial identities. In such a milieu, it is not surprising for an overwhelming section of the population to pronounce caste as their first identity irrespective of their sex, age, educational status and occupation. The campaign of the Sangh parivar and Islamic fundamentalists has not succeeded even in weakening caste and/or sectarian differences. It is however noteworthy that a relatively large section among the artisan caste groups, SCs and STs have preferred to introduce themselves first by their names, occupations or as Indian rather than by castes. This is because a secular identity becomes more advantageous

TABLE 1: SELF-INTRODUCTION TO A STRANGER

(Percentages)

Second	First Introduction in						Total
	Religion	Caste	Region	Occupation	Indian	Indian Name	
Religion	24	23	59	-	33	5	31
Caste	44	61	18	5	24	31	40
Region	3	5	10	16	6	3	6
Occupation	2	2	1	68	-	11	4
Indian	19	5	10	-	29	5	11
Indian name	9	4	2	11	8	45	8
Total	22	36	24	3	8	7	100

DK, NA excluded. N = 575

TABLE 2: COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

(Percentages)

Item	Fully Agree	Somewhat Agree	Fully Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	DK NA
1 I am proud of my 'quam'	89	5	1	3	2
2 My 'quam' is superior to the others in all respects	40	26	5	26	3
3 Social, economic and political interests of all members of my 'quam' are the same and for the protection of these interests all members of the 'quam' should work together.	78	15	1	2	4
4 Unity and organisation of the 'quam' are necessary for the protection of its interests	88	7	1	2	2
5 If it is necessary to acquire political power in the interests of 'quam', it should be done.	41	36	2	16	5
6 Interests of the Hindus and Muslims are mutually opposite, if one gets advantage, the other gets disadvantage	26	24	4	37	9
7 Problems and difficulties faced by Hindus/Muslims, people belonging to Muslims/Hindus are largely responsible	17	25	9	41	8
8 We should not transact with shop-keeper/factory owner/vendor belonging to other 'quam'	14	20	6	55	5
9 We should not rent or sell a house to members of the other community in our locality/housing complex	16	19	6	53	6

to them than their traditional caste identity which puts them at the lower rungs on the caste ladder. The question then arises as to how does an individual identity get reflected in communal consciousness?

## II

### Communal Consciousness

'Quam' (in Gujarati it is pronounced as 'kom') or 'jat', that is commune or community, is more often than not understood and referred to in day-to-day parlance as caste or cluster of castes in India. While referring in this manner, one imagines having an immediate or a distant social relationship, sharing common heritage and 'sanskar' (culture) and fraternity with members of the 'quam'. Such notion of 'quam' is not only prevalent among the caste-Hindus, but also among various Muslim social groups. We have already seen that in the midst of religion-based communal polarisations, many caste Hindus and Muslims prefer to identify their 'quam' as 'jati' or 'jamat'. Even while the Muslims as a minority are forced to join hands as Muslims on religious ground for their security and survival, a number of them (28 per cent) continue to identify themselves as maleks, memons, vohras, khojas, more salams Garesiyas and so on.

This does not mean that religious 'quam' as Hindus or Muslims do not exist at their collective consciousness. The above data show that after caste, most of them identified with the religious 'quam'. This is because of a variety of reasons. It is partly because of their real or imaginary historical heritage, linked with other social groups within the larger caste structure in the Hindu framework. Certain commonality among members of the 'same' religion through sharing of festivals, chanting name/s of the same god/s, performance of certain rituals, considering certain texts and scriptures as holy, etc, contribute to developing a common religious identity. State, religious leaders and intellectuals codify people as Hindus or Muslims for at least the last two centuries and see them as 'juxtaposed' in relation to one another. Significantly, social and religious reformers and political leaders who mobilised various 'jatis' and 'jamats' at various regional levels amongst Hindus as well as Muslims since the mid-19th century also helped in strengthening such boundaries.

Both meanings of the term 'quam', 'jati' or 'jamat' and Hindu or Muslim seem to exist almost simultaneously at a cognitive level. Within a milieu of communal riots, both the meanings interfuse and overlap when one speaks to respondents on issues related to 'quam' without specifying any religious community. It hence becomes difficult to conclude as to what exactly by the term 'quam' encompasses.

Consciousness of one's 'quam' or the communal consciousness in this context is not just a question of belonging to his/her community, but also the intensity of one's identification with it. In a 'communalised' situation, intensity of communal consciousness is related with one's perception about 'others' who are considered rivals. We have examined five dimensions of this complex state of mind. They are (i) identification with one's 'quam'; (ii) commonality of interests of the members of the 'quam' and hence the need of their protection; (iii) perceptions about 'others'; (iv) economic relations with others; and (v) political power for the 'quam'.

One gets socialised in 'jati' dharma from childhood. Even those traditionally considered as 'shudras' or 'ati-shudras' and treated as subordinate by those above are taught to perform the dharma sincerely so as to improve their positions in the next birth. Those unhappy with their ascribed position invent legends and sanskritise their rituals and life style to establish new status. Traditionally ascribed positions, as acknowledged in society, are often disowned and the aspired position becomes real. All caste associations in their meetings, conferences, festivals and journals repeatedly ask their caste members to be proud of their 'quam/jati' and to get united and organised to preserve and advance their interests and 'asmita', i.e., identity and dignity. Leaders of religious

organisations too do the same thing. They inculcate communal consciousness through various means. Symbols and legends are invented and history fabricated not only to glorify the past, but also to raise hopes for a better future. This has been the mission of the RSS since the 20s. Hindu religious leaders have given themselves the responsibility of 'reviving and rejuvenating' Hinduism and Hindu political leaders have created various symbols, festivals and idioms to foster unity among Hindus. They harp upon the greatness of their religion and the contributions that it has made towards world civilisation. This mission of developing a Hindu consciousness has continued. The BJP and the Sangh parivar have been greatly successful in this task in recent years. Like elsewhere in the country, they also launched massive campaigns in Surat dur-

TABLE 5: INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY OF INTENSE COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Identity	Proportion of Intense Communal Consciousness	
	First	Second
	Religion	23
Caste	24	30
Region	40	5
Occupation	5	1
Indian	15	8
Indian name	22	4

TABLE 3: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

		(Percentages)	
Sex	Occupation		
Male	26	Factory owners	24
Female	27	Professionals	43
		Traders	24
Age		White-collar workers	27
15-25 years	25	Factory workers	28
26-35 years	27	Vendors	29
36-46 years	28	Casual labourers	22
47-55 years	24	Others	29
Above 55 years	28	Caste/Community	
Education		Upper castes	28
Illiterate	25	Middle castes	22
Primary	29	Artisan castes	25
Secondary	22	Low castes	33
College	32	Scheduled castes	32
		Scheduled tribes	31
		Other Hindus	16
		Muslims	29
		Christians/jains/buddhists	37

TABLE 4: PERCEPTION OF FAMILY'S ECONOMIC CONDITION AND COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Perception of Economic Condition	Level of Consciousness				N
	Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Very bad	14	53	33	100	55
Bad	23	52	25	100	397
Not bad	24	49	27	100	176

ing 1989-90 with the aim of making Hindus conscious of their Hindu identity and to be proud of being Hindu. "Why should they feel shy of or inhibited from calling themselves Hindus?", the leaders asked. '*Garva se kaho hum Hindu hai*' ('say with pride that we are Hindus') was popularised by shouting of slogans, writing on walls, pasting posters and stickers in every nook and corner of the city. It was an aggressive campaign during the 1990 and 1991 assembly as well as parliamentary elections by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. A small section of Hindu secularists attempted to counter Hindu pride through stickers that said, '*garva se kaho hum insan hai*'. It was however confined to a small segment of various sections of the society. Hindu communalists retorted by saying that "yes we are 'insan', but we are also Hindus and what is wrong with being a Hindu?" There were no efforts at discussing the implications of such positions. Those who started this campaign simultaneously also talked about superiority of their religion over others. They kept emphasising their pride as members of their community and projecting their religion to be greater than others in all matters. They talked about strengths of Hinduism, and its 'glorious' past and stated that, "Hindus and Hindustan will rule over the world and the future belongs only to us" in their pamphlets and columns in newspapers. The question thus arises as to how far the people have imbibed this ideology?

An overwhelming number of persons irrespective of occupation, sex, income or political affiliation expressed that "I am proud of my 'quam'". Since we did not specify the term "quam" as a religious community or a caste, it is difficult to say to which 'quam' they referred. For some the 'quam' meant caste and for others their religious identity. However, all those who clearly professed being proud of their 'quam' do not subscribe to the Sangh parivar's or the non-Hindu fundamentalists' ideology of superiority of their 'quam' over others. Thirty-one per cent refused to take such a position and said that each community has good as well as bad aspects.

While trying to ascertain the extent of agreement with statements regarding common interests of the 'quam' and need for unity to protect such interests, except for a small minority (3 per cent), all subscribed to the view of having common socio-economic interests among all the members of a 'quam'. It is true that the idea of 'quam' and its interests are not understood similarly by all, While the respondents were not asked to clarify their concept of 'quam', some explained as to what they understood by the term. For a majority, it was a caste-based community. But at the same time a few also identified its meaning with a religious community. A similar pattern emerged while

examining the aspect of common interests of a 'quam'.

All castes and religious organisations propagate that their members have common interests and that they should work together for the protection of their interests. During the last assembly and parliamentary elections, the VHP, many of the sadhus and saints, and several front organisations of the BJP issued statements and distributed posters asking people to vote for the party which would protect the interests of Hindus. A question arises as to whether all members of a 'quam' have common social, economic and political interests. Here the understanding of common interests varies from individual to individual and no neat answer emerges. At a normative level, they wish to have as well as perceive common interests of the members. They believe in belonging to the same social group and thereby inherit a common culture—the culture of caste or the culture of religion. Political interests for them are either political dominance or protection. While economic interests mean economic upliftment of all members in the 'quam'. This means job opportunities, business prospects, better living conditions, etc. They do not consider, at least while thinking in terms of common interests of the 'quam', that the factory owners and the labourers or the landlords and the tenants belonging to the same 'quam' have conflicting interests.

To a question as to what they consider as common interests of the members of the 'quam', a postgraduate student wrote, "I am proud to be a Hindu because 'Bharatiya sanskriti' (culture) is very old and the Hindu religion is considered to be 'mahan' (great) in the entire world. *Geeta*, our religious book, provides inspiration to us, to the country, to human society, to all individuals, and to the whole world. I greatly adore and respect the *Geeta*. Bharat is a Hindu nation and it is Hindustan. We should work in the direction of improving the social and economic condition of our Hindu brethren and for that we should get ourselves organised and united so that others cannot harm our interests."

Another respondent who also understood the term 'quam' in terms of a Hindu identity, while elaborating what he meant by common interests, extended repetitive and fuzzy answers. He said that, "dominance of the other 'quam' should not be upon us"; and

that "our interests may be endangered by the other 'quam'" or that we are one and therefore our interests are the same.

A Muslim said that the "socio-economic and political interests of people in my community are equal and none in our community should be higher or lower. They all should work for the protection of the interests of all. But in reality this is not seen to be practised."

Another Hindu belonging to a Scheduled Caste group said that "according to the Constitution of India, interests of the members of our 'quam' are not opposite to each other. They are equal. However, there is inequality as far as economic interests are concerned and that ought not to be so. Therefore I believe that we all should work together for the protection of our interests." A member of a Scheduled Caste, who read 'quam' as caste said that his 'quam' was socially, economically and politically backward than the others and they should try to get equality with others. Another respondent from OBC said that, "in my village, members of certain castes own lands and are educated and powerful whereas members of our 'quam' are poor and illiterate".

The communality of economic, cultural and political interests of the members of a

TABLE 7: RELIGIOSITY AND COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

(Percentages)  
(N = 723)

Communal Consciousness	Religiosity		
	Low	Moderate	High
Low	28	18	19
Moderate	49	53	53
High	23	29	28
Total	100	100	100
N =	230	317	62

TABLE 8: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

(Percentages)  
(N = 723)

Communal Consciousness	Political Participation	
	Low	High
Low	22	25
Moderate	51	53
Intense	27	22
Total	100	100

DK, NA excluded.

TABLE 6: PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

(Percentages)  
(N = 723)

	Hardly	Occasionally	Sometime	Regularly
1 Visiting mandir/masjid/church	8	26	29	35
2 Attending bhajans/discourses	24	35	28	12
3 Reading sacred books	33	21	28	16
4 Providing financial support	21	42	30	4
5 Had gone on pilgrimage	48	28	20	2

'quam' as perceived by the respondents in this context seemingly indicates two things. Firstly, most of them are vague and talk about 'common interests' without specifying as to what they mean by it. They very nearly repeat what politicians say in public meetings—more of rhetoric than facts. It is *yox et practerea nihil*. Secondly, many visualise and consider 'common interests' only at a normative level for which they feel that members of their 'quam' should work together. Thirdly, those who interpret 'quam' as caste, perceive their 'quam' as 'social class' having social ties, uniform life style as well as similar economic status among its members.

In order to protect the interests of a 'quam', caste leaders and religious organisations often refer to the need of capturing political power. For instance, the Rana Samaj or the Koli Mandal of Surat repeatedly appealed to their caste members to vote for a Rana or Koli candidate in different elections for the protection of their interests. Similarly, tribals, Dalits, Patidars and others who are numerically large urge upon their caste members the need to acquire political power in order to improve their condition. Religious communalists too follow the same logic. The BJP and the Sangh parivar repeatedly propagate that the Congress has always pampered minority communities and thereby neglected the interests of the majority and the Hindus have to, therefore, get united and capture power by defeating the Congress—the protector of the Muslims. In the absence of this, they emphasise that the day is not too far when they will have to appear as a minority. During the 1991 assembly elections, several Sadhus and Saints appealed to Hindus to vote for that party or candidate claiming "to protect the interests of Hindus".

Those believing in commonality of interests among members of a 'quam', do not, however, necessarily subscribe to a view that there is a need to capture political power. As much as 18 per cent of the respondents did not agree with the view that it was necessary to obtain political power for protecting their interests. On the other hand, more than three-fourths did express a need to have political power for the interests of the 'quam'. However, we do not know as to what they actually meant by 'capturing power' and wonder whether it meant voting in elections for a member of their 'quam' or forming a political party or it was a pure and simple empty expression.

Communalists often invoke among members of their 'quam' feelings against other 'quam'. Tribals against non-tribals, kshatriyas against patidars, upper castes against backward castes and so on. Hindus are told that they face various problems for which Muslims are responsible. To a set of two questions aimed at ascertaining the

views of respondents about the extent to which they thought their interests (we specified in the question as Hindus or Muslims) conflicted with the interests of the other 'quam' while some did not reply, there were others who felt that it was difficult for them to say anything categorically. However, 50 per cent of the respondents, expressed a view that the interests of the two 'quam' were antagonistic. Some among them shifted their position by not blaming the other 'quam' for their problems with 42 per cent holding the other 'quam' (Muslim/Hindu) responsible for the problems being faced by their 'quam'.

During the riots, the Sangh parivar and the BJP as well as some other local organisations and individuals appealed to people through public meetings, street-corner gatherings and by distributing leaflets to boycott goods manufactured or sold by the Muslims. Hindus were asked to boycott Muslim autorickshawalas. In one case, a professor apparently looking like a Hindu woman, stopped an autorickshaw for going to the railway station. The driver asked "Madam! I am a Muslim, would you mind hiring my rickshaw?" The professor who did not subscribe to communal segregation was emotionally moved by the question. A few reported cases suggest that Muslims were asked or forced to vacate their houses located in predominantly Hindu localities. Even before riots, other things being equal, there has been a general tendency to prefer neighbours of similar social background. Living clusters of Jains, Vaniyas, Marwadis, Punjabis, low castes, etc, within the same colony is a testimony to this. Nonetheless, except among a few having aversion to non-vegetarian food habits, tendency of segregation on the basis of caste and community

in newly constructed apartments and colonies did not seem to exist. This situation has however changed for the Muslims, particularly after the riots. Communalists from both groups now talk openly that the 'others' should not be allowed to acquire a house in their localities. Let us attempt to ascertain to what extent the people of Surat subscribe to such views.

A majority of the people (nearly 60 per cent) do not support the idea of economic boycott. Though soon after the first phase of riots, Hindus avoided Muslim shop-keepers or vendors, an act determined partly by emotional anti-Muslim feelings as well as rumours about poison being mixed in food and the like, it did not continue for long. Even those believing in boycott, did not necessarily put that into practice owing to the intricate economic relationships. Similarly, a majority (69 per cent) did not support the idea of segregating houses on communal lines.

To get a clearer picture about the overall communal consciousness an index based on the nine variables was prepared. The 92 cases not responding to any of the questions have been dropped from the index. Each of the items has a four-point scale. Anyone strongly agreeing to all the propositions is given 36 points, and the one strongly disagreeing is given 9 points. Based on such scores, respondents have been divided into three categories. Those getting 22 or less points have been considered to have a lower degree of communal consciousness as against those getting 29 or more points and treated as highly communally conscious persons. Even while this is an arbitrary decision, according to the score, 51 per cent have moderate communal consciousness and 26 per cent high communal consciousness.

TABLE 9: FOR WHOM WOULD YOU VOTE IN FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS?

(Percentages)  
(N = 723)

Communal Consciousness	Religiosity				
	Congress	BJP	Others	Undecided	DK/Would Not Vote
Low	24	17	32	41	41
Moderate	46	53	56	60	44
Intense	30	30	12	19	15
Total	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
N =	162	316	25	67	61

TABLE 10: PRIORITISATION OF ISSUES ACCORDING TO THEIR IMPORTANCE

Sr No	Priority					Total
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	
1 Construction of Ram mandir/ mosque at Ayodhya	13	9	3	7	68	100
2 Price rise	40	20	18	16	6	100
3 Unemployment	9	31	30	23	7	100
4 Corruption	9	18	24	39	10	100
5 Population rise	29	21	25	17	8	100
N =	200	150	169	114	55	688

Intensity of communal consciousness was found to be more or less uniform among males as well as females. The pattern is also the same among all age groups. There is, however, some variation when we examine their education; 25 per cent of the illiterates as against 32 per cent of college educated persons we found to have a high degree of communal consciousness (Table 3).

Intense communal consciousness was found more or less in the same proportion among various religious groups, though it was found to be more pronounced among the Christians, Jains and Buddhists compared to the Muslims and the Hindus. They are 37, 29 and 26 per cent respectively. Among Hindus, the proportion is higher among the dalits, adivasis and other backward castes compared to the upper and middle castes (Table 3). Among the dalits and adivasis the phenomenon seems perplexing, for as seen earlier the tendency among them to opt for secular individual identity is generally high. The data suggest that collectivity, be it through religion or caste, is felt by them as necessary for their mobility or protection of interests. It seems to be a dilemma for many dalits or adivasis, for at one level they tend to shun their caste identity but at the same time need to inculcate communal consciousness while aspiring for political power and economic benefits.

Seemingly, communal consciousness is widespread in different degrees among all occupational groups. Twenty-four per cent of the factory owners or big businessmen as well as petty shop-keepers and 27 per cent of white-collar as well as blue-collar factory workers have intense communal consciousness. The case of self-employed professionals like doctors and lawyers suggests a different pattern with 43 per cent among them falling in the category of intensely communal individual. However, their number in the sample being too small, it might be hasty to draw conclusions.

The trend is more or less similar among the economically well off and contented and those having difficulty even in making both ends meet (Table 4). Proportion of intensely communal persons is slightly higher (33 per cent) among those who are worse off than those who are contented (27 per cent).

The highest proportion of intensely communal persons were found among those who preferred to identify themselves by regions. But as mentioned earlier, regional and religious identities are not mutually exclusive, for a majority who gave regional identity as their initial introduction, stated religion to be their second identity. Thus, if we take the first and second identities together, the pattern emerges as expected. Table 5 shows that intensely communal persons are strikingly low among those who preferred to

identify themselves by their name or as being Indian. And it is significantly lower among those who identify themselves in terms of their occupation.

### III Religiosity and Communal Consciousness

Some scholars consider that religion breeds communal consciousness. For them religion and secularism cannot exist together. For some others communalism is a political construct and is not related to an individual's faith in a religion. In order to probe into these propositions five questions were asked about participation in various religious activities. Table 6 shows that one-third of the respondents visit religious places regularly. Most of them did not however participate in other religious activities like attending 'katha' or discourses regularly. A majority did not read the sacred books and only 2 per cent had gone regularly on pilgrimage, i.e., 'jatra' or 'haj'. A low proportion of only 4 per cent regularly donated for various religious activities.

In order to get an overall picture of their participation in religious activities, an index of five activities was prepared. Those receiving 16 or more points have been considered to be relatively more active in religious activities. (They may be called persons having high religiosity.) Only 11 per cent of the respondents have shown such high level of religiosity and 40 per cent have low level of participation in various religious activities. Table 7 shows that it is hazardous to say that religiosity and communal consciousness go together. That is religious persons are not necessarily communal and vice versa. Proportionately smaller number of persons (19 per cent) having low communal consciousness are found among those who are active in religious activities. Nevertheless, it seems that if other things are constant, religiously active persons tend to become communal. This may be because meaning of religion has undergone change in which identity of being 'we' against 'they' is getting sharper and composite folk religion is getting weaker. Moreover, religious platforms have been used in invoking communal politics during the recent times.

### IV Politics and Communal Consciousness

Political leaders and social scientists often assert that communalism is a political issue. It may mean two things. One, political leaders appropriate communal issues in order to obtain larger support in mobilising people of one or the other community in electoral politics and second, that intensely communal persons are also politically ac-

tive. We shall examine the second aspect of the problem, i.e., relationship between communal consciousness and political participation.

Three indicators have been used to measure political participation, viz, (i) interest

TABLE 11: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO GAVE FIRST PRIORITY TO CONSTRUCTION OF RAM MANDIR/MASJID

Occupation	Percentage
Sex	
Male	12
Female	12
Age	
15 - 25 years	13
26 - 35 years	12
36 - 46 years	10
47 - 55 years	16
Above 55 years	15
Education	
Illiterate	10
Primary	12
High School	8
College	9
Social groups	
Upper castes	9
Middle castes	12
Artisan castes	15
Low castes	20
Scheduled castes	19
Scheduled tribes	-
Other Hindus	16
Muslims	14
Christian / jains / parsi, etc	2
Occupation	
Factory owners	14
Professionals	14
Shopkeepers	15
White-collar employees	8
Factory workers	15
Vendors	11
Casual labourers	19

TABLE 12: POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION, PARTY AFFILIATION AND COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THOSE WHO GAVE FIRST PRIORITY TO CONSTRUCTION OF TEMPLE/MOSQUE

Level of Political Participation	
High	23
Low	10
Supporters	
Congress	10
BJP	15
Other parties	
Communal Consciousness	
Low	6
Moderate	15
High	15
Religiosity	
Low	6
Moderate	17
High	14

in politics; (ii) participation in meetings/processions; and (iii) working for a party in election campaigns. Though one-fourth of the respondents reported taking interest in politics, only 4 per cent had a great deal of interest in such matters. All those interested in politics do not necessarily participate in various political activities. Twelve per cent of the respondents participated in public meetings and/or processions, and a smaller number worked for any party in election campaigns. Taking these activities together, only 11 per cent may be identified as politically active. Table 8 shows that there is no relationship between political participation and communal consciousness. A vast majority of politically active persons do not have intense communal consciousness and vice versa. What is striking however is that the proportion of intensely communal persons is more among those who are politically inactive. The question naturally arises here what can one infer from the above evidence: is there *depoliticisation* in electoral politics of the intensely communal individuals? Or would it mean that political participation in electoral politics tends to soften communal consciousness? These important questions with wider theoretical relevance need further examination.

It is now widely accepted that there is hardly any difference between the Congress and the BJP as far as communal politics is concerned. The Congress distributes party tickets in elections and positions on caste and community lines, shares platforms with religious and caste leaders who speak in a communal idiom. Their support is often sought to mobilise voters. The Congress has not made any effort to develop secular politics in the country, except for chanting populist slogans of secularism or Hindu-Muslim unity. As mentioned earlier, several Congress leaders hold similar views about the Muslims, believe in the dominance of the majority community and 'over-protection' to minorities. BJP politics in this matter is open. In such a situation how far are BJP and Congress supporters different in their communal consciousness? In order to identify Congress and BJP supporters a question was asked "whom would you vote for in the next elections?" 50 per cent respondents reported that they would vote for the BJP. An overwhelming number (88 per cent) of them were committed voters who voted for the same party in the 1991 election too. Thus, the BJP has gained 10 per cent more supporters. The Congress has more or less retained 26 per cent supporters which was the case during the last election.

Table 9 shows that both the Congress and the BJP have almost equal proportion of supporters who have intense communal consciousness and their size is not insignificant. Together they add up to 30 per cent of the respondents. The number of such persons is

significantly low among the supporters of Janata Dal, the Communist Party and other parties. Even among the undecided or non-voter individuals, proportion of intensely communal conscious persons is significantly lower than among the BJP and the Congress supporters. Does it suggest that they find no difference between the Congress and the BJP on communal issue or they are fed up of these parties?

## V

### Construction of Mandir and Communal Consciousness

Another political dimension of *communalisation* is reflected in people's views on the construction of the Ram mandir or Babri masjid at Ayodhya. Communal riots in Surat are closely related with the BJP and Sangh parivar campaign for construction of the Ram mandir. The campaign had been built up brick by brick for the last five years. And the riots followed soon after the demolition of the Babri masjid. Though in its campaign the BJP raised other economic and political issues, it essentially banked upon the issue of temple construction. This intensified communal division in society. We tried to ascertain as to how a common person viewed the priority of the temple.

In order to probe into this question, respondents were asked to prioritise five problems according to the importance that they gave to each of them. The problems were: (1) construction of the Ram mandir/mosque at Ayodhya; (2) price rise; (3) unemployment; (4) corruption in public life; and (5) the rising population.

About 5 per cent of the respondents did not reply to this question. Some responded that they did not understand as to what was more important and there were others for whom the day-to-day problems were more pressing than bothering about questions which fall in the domain of political leaders.

Among those prioritising the five issues (Table 10), only a small proportion of 13 per cent considered construction of the Ram mandir or mosque at Ayodhya as the most important issue to be solved, whereas as

high as 68 per cent gave it the last priority. Many among those giving first priority to the construction of the temple did so because it was a question of faith and dignity for them. One of them said, "I know that the BJP is not going to solve the problems of our community and is in no way different from the Congress. It aspires for power. But who is really bothered about solving problems? ... at least the BJP would unfurl the saffron flag on the Lal Killa. This is more important." Another respondent said that the Babri masjid was a symbol of slavery and a beginning of Muslim rule. Babar built the mosque by destroying the temple. Construction of the Ram mandir would be a new era for Hindutva and it would bring prosperity. Therefore we should not talk about poverty or unemployment. Once the temple is constructed, other problems would be solved. The Muslims giving priority to the construction of the mosque felt that by the demolition of the Babri masjid, "we were badly insulted. This was a direct assault on our very existence, and on our dignity." Another Muslim respondent said that the reconstruction of the mosque on the same site was necessary for secularism and that the minority community was protected by the Indian state. However, a handful of respondents gave priority to the construction of the temple just to end the communal problem once and for all. A medical doctor said that once the temple was constructed the series of communal riots of the last few years would come to an end and the country would be able to concentrate more on the other pressing issues.

Supporters of the construction of the temple/mosque over other priorities are found in small proportion among both males and females; various age groups and also among educated and illiterate (Table 11). They belong to all varieties of occupational and social groups. Contrary to general belief, their number however is small among white-collar workers and upper caste individuals. It is also significant to note that none among the respondents from Scheduled Tribes gave priority to the construction of the temple.

APPENDIX: CORRELATION AND COEFFICIENT MATRIX OF ITEMS REGARDING COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Pride to be	-	.6173	.6646	.3791	.2045	.3720	.1247	.1766	.1599
2 Communality of interests	.6173	-	.5730	.3623	.2735	.2650	.2285	.2077	.2307
3 Unity of organisation	.6646	.5730	-	.3813	.2307	.3696	.2010	.2050	.2017
4 Political power	.3791	.3623	.3813	-	.3178	.1728	.2778	.1381	.1442
5 Antagonistic interests	.2045	.2735	.2307	.3178	-	.0105	.4345	.2386	.2348
6 One's superiority	.3720	.2650	.3696	.1728	.0105	-	.0363	.1270	.1883
7 Others responsible for plight	.1247	.2285	.2010	.2778	.4345	.0363	-	.4658	.4216
8 Boycott	.1766	.2077	.2054	.1381	.2386	.1270	.4658	-	.6892
9 Segregation	.1599	.2307	.2017	.1442	.2348	.1883	.4216	.6892	-



As is apparent from Table 12, those who give first priority to construction of temple/mosque are in equal proportion among those who have moderate or high communal consciousness, but are expectedly in smaller proportion among those who have low communal consciousness. Similar pattern is found among people with different rates of participation in religious activities. They are fewer among those who rarely participate in religious activities than the ones who participate in such events more actively.

Construction of the mandir or masjid has become a political issue. However, a large proportion (23 per cent), of politically active individuals gave priority to the construction of temple/mosque. This means that for them the Ram mandir is a political issue. This is further substantiated by the fact that despite equal proportion of highly communal persons in both the parties, a larger number of BJP than Congress supporters gave priority to the construction of the temple. This is not surprising, for the BJP has made it a political issue.

## VI Overview

Caste identity is uppermost in the minds of most people even in urban area like Surat. It is more so among the OBCs than the dalits and the members of the upper castes. The OBCs in Surat have recently improved their condition and are upwardly mobile through caste idioms, organisation and solidarity in economic and political spheres. There is a tendency among the dalits to underplay their caste identity and opt for secular identity through occupation. This is more common among those who have higher education and are engaged in white collar jobs or as entrepreneurs for they feel that they have very little to be proud of their caste. It is important to note that despite a call and programmes for a Hindu or a Muslim unity, sectarian and caste identities continue to dominate. Caste and religious identity, however, is not opposite or contradictory at a personal level. For many, religious identity is but a continuation of the caste identity. Both co-exist though their emphasis changes with varying contexts.

Individual identity based on caste and religion, reinforces communal consciousness—the consciousness of being member of one's 'quam'. The connotation of the term includes both caste and religious community. But for many a notion of caste based community is closer and more identifiable than religious community. It is a 'social class' whose members not only share an identity, a particular life style and a definite value system but also have more or less similar socio-economic position as rich, business community, service class, labourers, poor, backward, etc. While doing

so economic differentiations within a caste, if they exist, are noticed but do not seem as antagonistic. But it is not so in the case of religion-based community consciousness. Economic and cultural differences between caste Hindus are so sharp and antagonistic that 'community of interests' as Hindus or Muslims is vague and rhetorical.

Caste or religious communal consciousness is widespread in Surat among people in all walks of life irrespective of their sex, age, education and place of belonging (local or immigrants). All of them, however, do not share communal consciousness to a similar extent. Most do not ascribe superiority to one's own community over others or economic polarisation between the communities. Nearly one-fourth of the population (of course not insignificant, especially with potential of being fanatic) were found to have high communal consciousness which may tend to be fanatical. They are found in all social and occupational groups with only slight variation in their proportion. High communal consciousness is neither particular caste or class, local or immigrant, literate or illiterate group phenomena. Significantly neither religiosity nor political participation is related to intense communal consciousness. This makes the problem more complex than is generally recognised; and requires multipronged strategies to deal with it.

Despite predominance of caste and religious individual identity and communal consciousness, when it comes to choice on

issues, people do not give preference to religious issues over the economic ones. Even soon after the riots when communal passions were high, an overwhelming number of them did not give preference to construction of the Ram mandir or masjid over price rise or unemployment. Thus, though communal consciousness is widespread and people are susceptible to communal slogans and symbols and may indulge in rioting for the time being, they do not continuously get swept away by communal categories and issues. They see that as the game of politicians.

### Note

[I thank Anjana Desai and Biswaroop Das for giving comments on the draft of the paper, Marzia Cutpicwala and Satyakam Joshi for their assistance in supervising the field work.]

\* Surat has 36 municipal wards. The biggest ward has 49 polling booths and the smallest ward has just 3 polling booths. We have selected minimum one or 10 per cent of the polling booths from a ward. Fifty-three polling booths were selected. From each polling booth 25 voters were selected with help of random table for interview. Total number of respondents were 1,325. From them, we could interview 723. Number of them were either wrongly listed or shifted their residence. Some were not available at the time of interview, they either left the area or were out of station or not available after two visits. A few avoided us.

## ACTIONAID

an international development organization is  
LOOKING FOR

**PROJECT OFFICER** For its Regional Office  
at AURANGABAD (Maharashtra State).

Selected Candidate is likely to be a person  
between age 25-30 years.

Fluent in English & Marathi. A post graduate in  
any of the Social Sciences from reputed  
University.

Have understanding of rural area and / or poorer  
communities.

Salary will commensurate with qualifications and  
experience.

*Initial appointment for a period of one year.*

Please send your application to :

**The Regional Co-ordinator**  
**C/o. JANARTH**

P.O. Box No. 127, 19, Samadhan Colony,  
AURANGABAD (Maharashtra State)